

Interview with Jack Durrance, December 1994

Tape One, Side A:

Jean: In Denver, about to interview Jack Durrance.

Jack: Glenn, in 1936. [cat meows] But I never climbed with him. And uh, I did climb his route when I went up the Teton. No the second time I went up I checked his route. Never has anyone received such notoriety in 20 feet of climbing as Glenn. And uh, he's not a competitor, and he's not competitive about his climbing. I think he faced a few feet of climbing that he wasn't entirely equipped for had he had training to do it. And he did it successfully. It is a fatal fall awaiting him if he didn't make it. And um, the rest of the ridge that he climbed was very simple, and not anywhere close to the difficulties of going around the corner from Wall Street to the Ridge. Up to that, I guess everyone thought he did a nice job and they really did it up around that, the movies and the rest of it. And no one in the history of mountaineering has anyone received as much acclaim for 20 feet of climbing. If it was that much. As he did. So he got great support from his climbing group, which is not easy for me to understand. And uh. ...

Jean: What do you mean from his climbing group?

Jack: From the school. They had some excellent, still have, excellent climber in that group. And, um, they are all competitive and they love to complain about the other competitors as much as they can. But they seem to have a feeling or let it be known that they have a feeling ... I've never talked to them much. I have very little to do with the climbing outfit. Uh, Paul Petzoldt invited me out in 1936 to join in and I joined in for a while and in time I found out what a rouge he was. He had no intention of paying me for the climbs that I did. So, I fixed that, I paid myself.

Jean: How did you do that?

Jack: I just kept the money I collected. And he said why, one day he told me, he said I think this countrys too big for the two of us. I said, When are you leaving. He was twice my size. And uh,

Jean: [laughing] That is the perfect response.

Jack: And so, I didn't leave. A matter of fact I tried for the concession the next year, and he had to go to Washington and get all of his influential friends to go to bat for him, or he wouldn't have got it back. They were anxious to get rid of him, which isn't hard to think about. He really did any and all things that he wanted to, and the way he wanted to do them. And, well, the supervisor of the rangers and all, it was tough sledding with him. And they were happy to have the program go to Glenn because he was much easier to get along with.

Jean: Which year did you apply for it? Do you remember? Was it in the thirties?

Jack: Oh, it would have been 37. I was out there in 36, and I applied for it in 37. And yet I came very close to getting it. But I couldn't, cause I couldn't have followed through with my education, and it would have been no fun.

Jean: Not to put Paul's climbing down or anything, but your climbing was just exceptional.

Jack: Well, I had had some, some coaching in Bavaria where I had lived for eight years, and I climbed with some of the best German climbers, I mean I practiced with them on the Eesar [spelling] River, which flows through Munich, on the cliffs. They were sandstone cliffs. We practiced without ropes. You could go up, you could also climb back down without falling. It was a mean place because it was halfway up the slope where the climbing began, and there were little pebbles that were encased in sandstone that we find almost anyplace and they came out if you weren't careful. If you fell, you fell down this slope, and I'd never fallen on [inaudible]. I didn't fall myself, so I don't know how badly you can get hurt. But it was good training. You did just what you felt you could do and then climb back down without assistance. I did that for a couple years. And I had done some of it already, in Darmish. And I went off and did a climb from the Tutschwitz to the Auschwitz, did a climb, have you ever been to Zurich?

Jean: Mmm hmm. I lived in Germany for a year, and went to Bayern. I was

there for visit, but I didn't.

Jack: Did you go to Darmisch?

Jean: I think we passed ... yeah, but it was so long ago.

Jack: Yeah. Okay. Well, I did some climbing around there. -- stein was the name of the range. And I had a buddy who was a little bit nuts. And we got benighted one time in the fall. They rang the bells on all the churches for us. And my teachers, professors from the Realschule joined the rescue group. We didn't need rescuing ourselves. We were asleep in one of the mountain huts. And when they arrived, and all they did was give us hell. Oh yeah, they were very angry, and the germans know how to give people hell.. And I caught it for a long time after that. We were called the Gipflersturmers. And uh, so when I got to the Tetons, well, they had no instructions, they had no ideas at all of bouldering. I started bouldering around Jenny lake. And we would get the boulders and do little tricks on them and the same held true there. You weren't aloud to jump off. You had to climb down. And some of the Dartmouth boys developed enough technique so they could do the climbing better than Paul. We always said Paul, Paul climbs with a shovel. So he could pull the loose gravel with him. The path where he falls. [something like this. this last comment is inaudible]

Jean: Who were the other Dartmouth climbers who were there with you? And you were from Dartmouth, too.

Jack: Paul Petzoldt was invited by the Dartmouth Outing Club to give a lecture with pictures, and the pictures were very nice, and I wanted to go out. So he signed me on as a member of his climbing group, and I picked a few people up, not very many, who weren't busy. And so, he never paid anything, and I paid myself, otherwise I'd a starved. Then finally, he said we are going to climb the North Face. And I said I have no intention to climb the North Face. Its too risky. I don't like to climb in places where you are subjected to rockfall. There is not much you can do about rockfall if it gets you, you're dead. Well, I did it anyway. And uh, each time there was a pitch to climb, Paul let me lead. And if there was a place to walk, he would walk ahead and then wait for me to come up and say where are you going now? I said, I think I'll go up there. And so, I led him through

the North Face, and he finally came out the North Ridge, oh about 20 minutes easy, very easy walk to the top. And he unroped and we got there. His brother was the third one on the rope. I was belaying him. And while I belayed him up, he went to the top. And then he wrote up something for the New York Times. He claimed to be the leader.

Jean: Oh.

Jack: And I didn't find that out for two or three years.

Jean: Really. So you hadn't seen the article?

Jack: Well, I hadn't seen the article, and heard about it, and there he was the leader. Well, that didn't surprise me. I'm talking about Paul Petzoldt. Not Glenn Exum. Glenn Exum was at the ranch. Paul Petzoldt. I can tell you a lot about him. But you're not writing about him.

Jean: But, I am writing about the thirties, so ... um, whatever you are telling me is helpful. So don't worry about that.

Jack: Well, he had a personality that puts himself very innocent and interested in people and they felt very highly of him. And this was all for the birds. And so did Glenn Exum was hired on his ranch, which wasn't his ranch. It belonged to uh, do you know anything about the ranch? Where everyone started? It was uh, ...

Jean: Are you talking about where the guide school was based? Or are you talking about, um ...

Jack: Oh no. It was on the opposite side. It was over by ...

Jean: I know what you are talking about. It was over by the ski area.

Jack: It was over by, oh the slide.

Jean: Gros Ventre?

Jack: Gros Ventre slide. It was known as the Teton Ranch, I believe.

Jean: Teton Valley Ranch. Its a camp now.

Jack: And it belonged to an industrialist who had climbed with Paul.

Jean: I know what you are talking about, because Paul and his first wife worked there.

Jack: And uh, uh, Glenn was a nice guy, and whether he flirted with Paul's wife or not, they had a big fight the second day I was there, which I thought Paul was gonna kill Glenn.

Jean: Because he thought Glenn flirted with his wife?

Jack: I didn't see anything. I didn't notice anything. Whether he was drunk or not, I didn't notice. I thought my god, what kind of outfit have I got myself into? And I stayed on the ranch. It was too early in the spring to find one, it was very early June. And then we moved over to Jenny Lake, where Paul had a tent and I had a small tent. And were were near headquarters at Jenny Lake. And people came to climb, and Paul took as many as he could. And when he had more than he could handle, he told me to take em up. During that time, I met a guy named Spofford, and I went climbing with Spofford, and we did the East ridge of the Grand, and a few little climbs on it. The Idle and the Worshiper on the way up Teewinot. And uh, Spofford [maybe Crawford] and I did the famous route on Symmetry Spire which is about half of where all the people that are guided go, because its not up to the top as, they are not in shape, and they can do that in a day's time without spending a night in the mountains. And uh, they charged enough so that it paid off, and it was used by all of the guides, and they created a climbing school right beneath it. And they were taught the techniques of rappelling, and a little climbing, and how to tie themselves on. And most of the clients of the climbing group were sent up Symmetry spire. And I did the first climbs with Spofford, and then the North Face with Paul and with one of his brothers. He didn't want to climb it either. And Fritz Wiesner. He was the leader of the K-2 expedition. Had asked Paul how to get to it and how to climb it. And Paul had told him, but he decided that he'd rather climb it before Wiesner. But he couldn't climb it, so that's where I came in. and he ordered me to climb it. And, I don't know why, but I conceded to him. [I believe here he is referring to the North Face of the Grand.

Jean: I was going to say!

Jack: Well, I didn't know that he was as bad as he turned out to be. I hadn't figured him out. And, uh, there are numerous stories about him. He sold the ranch that he didn't own for a bar down in Jackson. And the owner of the ranch came out and found that somebody else had his ranch. That Paul Petzoldt had traded for a bar down in ...

Jean: Did this happen in a card game or something?

Jack: The Frontier Bar, it was right across from the Log Cabin. And I don't know how he managed to do that, but he always instilled such trust in people that they thought it was all above board. And the ranch belonged to Petzoldt, which it didn't. Coven, that's who owned it, Gus Coven.

Jean: A couple. And Jane Coven.

Jack: Well, I met Gus Coven in Glenn's house on the meadow there, and Coven spent the whole afternoon telling us about he regained his ranch, and prior to Petzoldt, well he had innumerable accounts. He claimed that he was bootlegging liquor from Salt Lake to Wyoming.

Jean: He told me that.

Jack: He told you that?

Jean: Well, he didn't say he was doing it, but he mentioned something like that.

Jack: Who told you that?

Jean: Petzoldt.

Jack: I'll be darned.

Jean: Well, he didn't say he, but he did mention once, I mean I just talked with him for about an hour when he was trying to do this last climb, but

he said he had at one point given somebody alcohol, that guy from Edinburgh, or ...

Jack: Well, the fellow that owned that Moose, Wyoming store ...

Jean: Dornan's?

Jack: Well, Dornan was a hothead and he told Paul he couldn't come to his bar, or his store, or else he'd kill him. Heh, heh. He probably meant it, too. So Paul was not an upstanding citizen of Jackson Hole.

Jean: No. But you met him back at Dartmouth, and he invited you to come out here and climb, and it seemed appealing to you.

Jack: That's right. He was gonna pay me to climb for him, you know. I never discussed it. I trusted the guy to be fair. Then all of a sudden I was out of cash, he hadn't given me anything. So, the next time I guide some, I'd save the money for myself, which I did. Then he told me that the place was, Jackson Hole was too big for the two of us. [says this backwards].

Jean: When did the Devil's Tower thing happen?

Jack: We had a oh, I have to think a while, cause what he did, he got there before I did. And so did two of the climbers from Rocky Mountain Park up here at Estes. And none of them knew how to climb well enough to climb it. And one of the boys from the Rocky Mountain area here fell and cracked his ribs. And, he finally got one of the boys to go up with him. And Paul was there and he had tried it, and of course no way he could have climbed it. So he made a deal with, the news media was all over the place, and he made a deal and was taking pictures of our climb and not paying a damn bit of attention to the rope as I tried to climb the first pitch. And there was a, the rock was glazed with a coat of ice, and I had rubber shoes and ...

Jean: Oh. Verglass?

Jack: Not even. And my brother said he won't paying a damn bit of attention to my needs with the rope or anything. He was just taking pictures. He came up and he told me that. And I said, well, we ought to jiggle that. And they put the camera in the sack and they want us to haul it up we'll jiggle it a bit, so we busted the camera and exposed all the

film.

Jean: You did?

Jack: Wait until you hear this. He tried to pull the trick of beating me to the top, and there was a little climbing piece and he couldn't do it. So he had to wait until I got there. And I knew what was going to happen. It was going to be a foot race, because its a path near the top. And so, I led it. And when I got to the other side I untied myself. And I brought him over and he had to untie himself. And while he did it, I ran to the top. He wanted to beat me to the top so that he was the rescuer. It was pretty ugly. Well, he got to the top, somebody brought the sack and the busted camera. And the whole time we were up there, he rewound all the exposed film on the spool and put it back in a disguised the entry to the camera, and when we got back down to the bottom, Joyner was the name of the custodian. He approached my brother-in-law and said, you guys really did something I would never belief. He says. You did alright, didn't you? And I says I don't know what the hell you are talking about. What are you talking about? So Petzoldt got a big sum of money as he gave the camera to the new media, and Paul gave it to em as if he had made picture of the whole climb. And he didn't have a damn thing. And then he made tracks getting out of there as fast as he could. So uh, unbelievable. Oh. Then he killed a guy over in uh,

Jean: In India, right?

Jack: In India. A guy that had taken him into his house and fed him. Gave him shelter. The guy is a psychopath.

Jean: How do you think Glenn ended up with Paul? How do you think that happened?

Jack: Glenn must have climbed the mountain that he climbed, his ridge, I know, sometime before I got there. I don't know when he did that.

Jean: Thirty-one.

Jack: When?

Jean: Thirty-one. It was in the early thirties. Like thirty-one.

Jack: Well, I got there in '36. I guess Glenn was part of his Mountain climbing cadre, I don't know.

Jean: Do you think Glenn just happened to luck out because of Paul's bad reputation? I mean, in terms of getting the guide school?

Jack: Well, I never knew the mechanics. Glenn told me one time and went through it all. I can't remember, but they shared the concession for a year or two, then the first Karakoram expedition was in '38, and Paul Petzoldt was on that one. And then when I heard Charlie Hobbs give an account of it — he and Paul got as high as the expedition got — and they decided to turn back. He said Paul took three steps higher than Charlie. Nobody [inaudible] Paul. Well, sent a plea to the members of the party when he was in jail for killing this guy, and he said he needed \$300 to get out of jail. And then he collected \$3,000. And all he needed was \$300. So with that extra money, he and his wife went and circumvented the earth by going back by the pacific route with the money.

Jean: Did they embezzle diamonds?

Jack: What?

Jean: Did they embezzle diamonds? Did you know anything about that?

Jack: Oh, yeah. He had the crown jewel of some monarch, I don't know who it was, and uh, had em sent back to this country, and a I understood it, had them stowed away over in the town, over on the other side of the Wind Rivers. What town was he in when he ... Oh, I don't know the name of the town. At any rate, the place burned down. They had it stored, and the place burned down, and all the precious picture and all burned up.

Jean: Oh, he told me about that. The burning of all of his stuff.

Jack: Well, did anyone set it? Or ...

Jean: I don't know. Who knows.

Jack: Anyway, if you are writing something, you should write about Paul Petzoldt.

Jean: Well, you know what's interesting? Paul, and I'm not sure of the chronology here. Yvon Chouinard is the person behind this book.

Jack: He is? Well, Chouinard wants it written.

Jean: This book. And when Paul, anyway, I don't know if it is an accident, or if Paul found out and is now doing his own, but Paul is now writing a book too.

Jack: Sure, yeah. His wife wrote one about it.

Jean: Yeah. On Top of the World.

Jack: Its all supposed to be wrong. There is not supposed to be a word of truth in it, is what someone who read it said. I've never seen it.

Jean: There probably isn't, but its a good story.

Jack: Well, he'll make a good story out of himself. He's just that way.

Jean: Well, this book is about Glenn. But I need to include Paul in parts because of the beginning of the guide school. I think he was just really afraid that I was going to try to write stuff about him.

Jack: What did he say? Did he say that you couldn't or what?

Jean: No, he was just really afraid that um, I was actually trying to do investigative stuff about him. And he recorded our conversation, just like I did.

Jack: Well, my brother in law is trying to get his biography, and uh, it would be a difficult one to do, because I think Coven, that owned the ranch, is dead now. Glenn listened to all the details of that, but I doubt if he'll say. He thinks Paul's a nice guy. I question his sanity. He says, but he's a nice guy. I say, nice my ...

Jean: Well, Glenn just doesn't ever say anything bad about anybody. That's

just the way he is.

Jack: Yeah, he doesn't every say anything bad.

Jean: Well, the other thing is, Glenn felt guilty just telling me why he got the guide school. So Glenn is just one of those people who ...

Jack: Well, Glenn and he, Glenn told me, were together for a couple of years. And then he went to K2, and I think that's when Glenn took it over entirely, because he wasn't there at all. I even think that Glenn paid him. He charged Glenn something for it and Glenn paid it. I'm very suspicious. He wouldn't give it up without a settlement. He had some kind of understanding. And he had nothing to fear from Glenn.

Jean: Yeah. Cause Glenn wouldn't try to take it over or anything.

Jack: My brother in law and I can't understand Glenn being that ...

Jean: Naive?

Jack: Well, naive, or forgiving. Cause the guy really, he almost killed him, when he threw him out on the ranch.

Jean: When was that?

Jack: Its been in 36, when i first arrived.

Jean: Oh. That night.

Jack: I went out with Fred Brown. Fred Brown was supposed to take me out, course Paul never paid him a thing for it. But Fred took me, saying he was going to pay part of his expenses, what he got for taking me out. Course, I'm sure Paul never paid any of it. Let me say something about Glenn, now that I've told you about Paul. Its inevitable because they are both associated with the guide service. Glenn is a dreamer and he has no, you know, he should have been a preacher. Because he thinks everybody's good. Even Paul. Pauls a good guy he'll say. I'll say okay. Uh, his hold over these western mountaineers, and thats what they all are, they all have reputations for being good climbers. And good climbers are usually

bastards.

Jean: I've noticed.

Jack: And hate each other. Chouinard is an exception of that. He is an awful nice guy. I got his book and an autograph from him.

Jean: Climbing Ice?

Jack: Yeah. And I've seen him out in his bailiwick in Venture. I've seen the buildings and the operation. It is very nicely done. They have a baby school. All the workers who have babies bring them in and have them right there on the property. Have you ever been out to Ventura?

Jean: I've never been out to Venture, but I've discussed his philosophy of his work place with him.

Jack: He is an exceptionally nice guy. And he loves fishing. I think he took that up to save his life. Because he got pretty, uh, uh

Jean: After the China trip?

Jack: China trip? I don't know where it was. Did he go on one of those expeditions through China?

Jean: Well, he was on that trip with Al Read and Kim Schmitz and Yvon and I don't know who else, but a couple of people died and it was when Yvon caused an avalanche.

Jack: He's supposed to have caused an avalanche?

Jean: Well, I mean not on purpose of course.

Jack: Well, if he's climbing. Anybody can cause an avalanche.

Jean: You trigger an avalanche.

Jack: You drop a rock, and thats all that takes.

Jean: And one person died, and Kim Schmitz was seriously injured.

Jack: Well, I didn't know that. I'm just not interested in things like that, and so I don't look them up.

Jean: Well, ...

Jack: Anyway, if he's footing the operation about Glenn, I can only say the nicest things about Glenn. His wife is overpowering and tells him what to do most of the time. And when we came to visit she would disappear in the house because she didn't want to hear the things that we were going to say.

Jean: Because they were harsh things? Or ...

Jack: Well, we usually got to talking about Paul at some point. And Glenn would get his guitar and knock off a sad story or something. Get us in the mood. And my brother-in-law is not one easily swayed. And you've never met him, have you. Henry Colter.

Jean: Really! Colter? From ... Colter's Hell and Colter Bay?

Jack: No, no no. C-O—U-L. Uh, uh, he has a story about that. Somebody that was, some dudine, which is what we call the females who work at the dude ranches, she wanted to know who he was. She wanted to see someone at the WhiteGrass Ranch. And he said he was Henry Coulter. And she says, well, you are the explorer, aren't you? And he said, no, I spell my name differently. And he spelled it out for her. Yeah, you should talk if you ever get to Hannover. Coulter wrote the book on Talus. On the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club

Jean: Did that just come out?

Jack: That's been out for about six months or more.

Jean: Ah hah. I'm about to go buy that.

Jack: That has a lot about the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club in it. A little bit about me because I started it. Uh,...

Jean: Barry Corbet was telling me to get it.

Jack: Did he read it?

Jean: I don't think he read it yet.

Jack: Well, his name is in it a lot. Well, what can I say about Glenn? Glenn, he's pathologically forgiving, I think. And he sees nothing wrong with Paul. He's just a guy, fighting his way through life. If everybody fought their way through life like he did, there wouldn't be many of us around.

Jean: What do you think about the Exum Guide School and what they've done throughout the years? Do you have an opinion about that?

Jack: Well, they are, how they ever got all of these guys to do it has amazed me, because knowing mountaineers as I do, why they would put up with such, well, Paul used to go down and talk to the clients before they climbed the mountain. And to have these roughnecks go for this is beyond me. I don't know what Glenn Exum had that turns these guys on that way, because that's not right.

Jean: You mean the guides? Or the clients.

Jack: Guides. The clients, they would eat it up. But the guides eat it up too. Its very interesting to me.

Jean: I'll tell you what it is they tell me. It was that he was a father figure to them.

Jack: Yeah, well, I don't know what it is.

Jean: And Yvon said that he thinks that a lot of climbers do not have good relationships with their fathers. And so that's why someone like Glenn who was very fatherly and forgiving Everyone I talk to says it.

Jack: Thats interesting. Because Chouinard is a wise old cuss himself. And uh, he started out with nothing and made a go of it, and has my admiration. For him, which I don't have for Glenn at all. Glenn lucked into a 20 foot climb and they made him totally famous. For twenty feet. Can't

believe it. I never had been able to believe. And he thought I was a great climber but we never climbed together. And I wasn't a great climber. I was just plain ordinary. Facts were that there weren't many climbers out there. There was the guy that climbed in the north ridge, what's his name? Underhill. He had climbed in Europe and knew the techniques and all and Fryxell didn't know what ridge to climb. I climbed up to the place where they overhang and it was too late in the afternoon and I had sick people with me. And I leave the night on the top of the Grand which was an experience I didn't want to have. So we turned around, went back down. Um, but beside from that, they were cowboys, you know, and ...

Jean: Who were the cowboys?

Jack: Well, uh, Paul Petzoldt was a cowboy.

Jean: Mmm hmmn. Mnn hmm. Idaho.

Jack: And his brothers. There's something in the family, because his brother was a crooked jockey and got fired from, for illegal behavior on the track. And he was a happy-go-lucky, very small guy. How they were brothers seemed impossible. Here's this giant Petzoldt and Glenn, and what was his brother's name?

Jean: I know who you are talking about. He guided for a while, too.

Jack: He's died?

Jean: No. He guided for a while too.

Jack: I didn't know that. He had two brothers. What were their names?

Jean: I don't know what his brothers names were, because I don't know that much about Petzoldt, but I do know that one brother took on, the first time he guided took people up the wrong mountain, and he was so worried about what Petzoldt was going to do that he dropped down into the Idaho side and let another guide take his client down.

Jack: [laughter] Oh really?

Jean: Uh huh. Another guide told me that story. I've got it in my records.

Jack: Well, my brother-in-law knew the young one, the jockey, and he had to me smaller than me because a jockey ... the name's on my tongue. He was [inaudible] and likeable and the other one that climbed the North face with me was a sour old guy dominated by his bigger brother.

Jean: I think that might have been the guy who guided maybe.

Jack: And he might have been a guide, but he didn't know anything about climbing, either.

Jean: So, you didn't do much with Glenn at that time. You didn't know him, either.

Jack: I had very little to do with him, or he wasn't around, not guiding, as far as I know in 36. He was around that summer. And I didn't know about any of the arrangements that they had, but I know that they shared, in 37, they shared the concession, and Glenn should have taken it over in 38. In 39, because Paul was not there at all. And i think he had a financial, I would, I'm sure that Paul wouldn't settle for anything less than a financial appreciation of having it. And uh, he got along famously with all these rough necks, and my brother-in-law knew some of them, and uh, at the memorial for, who was the guy that burned up in ...

Jean: Ortenberger.

Jack: Yeah. Ortenberger was a good climber and a very notable guy that had it out with all the superintendents. He was critical of them. It was a damn shame that ... He missed this guy, this one guy. He was over in the library at the University, and once a year he would visit this person. On the day of the fire, he got there, and they, this guy and his wife wanted to escape and so they were trying to escape and the guy fell and broke his leg. And he was near a porta-hydrant which was half turned on, had water going, and his wife and Ortenberger went back to their house, and they found them burned up. One in the car port and the other inside the house. And that was such a shame. The guy, he was writing and saving things that he found in the library. Have you been to the library in Jackson?

Jean: Oh yeah.

Jack: As the, did you ask the librarian?

Jean: About what he was saving?

Jack: You should have asked her about what Ortenberger put aside. There was an account in the newspapers about the liquor hold up which never happened. Which means they stole it all. [I don't understand this].

Jean: Well, I know he was writing a book with Renny Jackson.

Jack: Who was writing a book?

Jean: Are you talking about Ortenberger?

Jack: Yeah.

Jean: At the time of his death, he was updating a book with Renny Jackson.

Jack: Yeah. The guide book. Jackson and his wife are finishing the guide book.

Jean: Catherine. Yeah.

Jack: Now, they've almost got it finished.

Jean: So you started the climbing club at Dartmouth?

Jack: That's right.

Jean: So you started this whole legacy of climbers coming to Jackson. And you were the first? As far as you know. And how long did you stay, and why were the Tetons appealing?

Jack: Why didn't I do what?

Jean: Well how long did you, how many summers did you come out?

Jack: Oh, I came out in 36, 37 and 38. And 39 I went to K2, and I came out in 40 and did the West face in 40, my brother in law. That was the only climb we did that year. And that was by far the most difficult of them. And some of the guides have done it. Ortenberger, I said what would you classify. I don't know how you picture numbers on the severity of the climb. He gave me a very low one, to pull my leg. He said it was 27 or something like that, I don't know. Then he described the climbing of it, and he had respect. It was the kind of climbing that they do in Yosemite, and the Alps. Where you are on thin ice.

Jean: You mean verglass.

Jack: Not verglass. Thin ice is a ...

Jean: Oh, you are using it as an expression.

Jack: A fall would mean several thousand feet. And uh, there's Bob Bates and Bill House, from the Alpine Club, sittin there on the crawl on the Grand, and watched us to the last part of it. They happened to be climbing the Grand the usual route. And I asked them if they could see any crips [grips?] or anything over there. He says, No, I can't see any better than you can. I said well then we'll have to go across it without a piton, because it wouldn't go in anywhere. And that was perhaps the most difficult few feet I ever climbed. I was nervous about it, you know.

Jean: What drew you to the Tetons? What was it about the area?

Jack: Oh, it was sort of spectacular, how they come up out of the flat valley, you know, to about 6,000 feet isn't it? The valley is 6,000 ...

Jean: then it tops out at about 14,000. The valley is 6,700 in Lupine Meadows.

Jack: It is. Okay. Well, its about six or seven feet straight up out of that, the valley you know, and there are not many placed you find mountains doing that.

Jean: Was it that it was also Alpine Climbing?

Jack: And then the character of rock was ideal for the climbing. Beautiful rock. and then the Exum Route, so to speak, after you get on the ridge and climb up, is magnificent rock all the way up. And then I did the lower half of the Exum Ridge. We have beautiful rock. Handholds and things that are unbelievable on that. There is a steep pitch in the middle of it that goes right up to where Glenn traversed in. And that had handholds and foot holds that were unbelievable. They were eroded into this slab. And you could put your whole foot in, and take, I called it beer, hand holds, like the beer glasses.

Jean: Beer? Like the Bierstein? [laughter] Or Bierkrug.

Jack: Yeah. And the people who climbed it, I talked to a couple of gals who were climbing for Exum, and one said that was her favorite climb, that ridge, the lower part.

Jean: What's it called?

Jack: Well, my brother and I call it the Durrance Ridge. With the Exum on the top half.

Jean: Is that what they now call the complete Exum?

Jack: I think they do call it that, yes.

Jean: Yeah.

Jack: We tried to get Ortenburger to change that. And he used to pull our leg. That it doesn't matter. Its a rock. [inaudible] what name is attached to it.

Jean: Well, you actually have ... I know that you motive wasn't to set out to have this happen, but you are very very well known and respected among the climbers.

Jack: Yeah, well I ...

Jean: Oh, absolutely. People really view you as the person who did it.

Jack: I know I sense that when I'm up there, but I don't deserve it. I've

done nothing very spectacular.

Jean: Well, you established ... pardon?

Jack: The West Face was a good climb. And I climbed the West Ridge and bivouacked twice on it. And uh, I never knew where I got lost. The guy that was with me, named Davis, Mike Davis wrote it up and I read it, and I recognize that we got lost in a bunch of towers, and spent the second night. The second night wasn't as nice as the first night. We had a rocky bed. The second night. That was a long time. We started out up, what's the name of the canyon, Cascade Canyon, and when we got below the ridge that comes off of Mt. Owen, we encountered a, what the thing with the big horns? The animal with the great big horns.

Jean: Big horn sheep? Bison? Moose?

Jack: Moose. Moose was right there. And moose was right in the trail. And so we both, Mike and I both, without taking our packs off, climbed the saplings that were there. Trouble with Mike was, that he didn't look to see how big around the tree was. And when he got up high, he came down, right in front of the damn moose. And I nearly fell out from laughing. And the moose looked at him, and you know, they hit you with their front feet.

Jean: They scissor kick.

Jack: Yeah. And I expected that to happen. There sort of wasn't anything funny to Mike. And the damn thing looked at him, and I think laughed a little bit, and walked around and got off the trail. And I had fits of laughter. I couldn't walk for another half hour. I kept telling him, I said, The higher you climbed, the close you got to the moose. [laughter]

Jean: Do you think the guide school contributed anything to the progression of American Mountaineering.

Jack: Well, run by Petzoldt, it was Petzoldt and whoever took his overflow, and that was me. And that was nothing. And um, he didn't charge very much, \$25 to go up the Grand was a cheap charge when I see the charges that they ...

Jean: Its much more expensive now, but ...

Jack: Yeah, and I don't know that he contributed anything, except for his own pocket book. But I think that Glenn, Glenn made it a very nice family, and how he got all of the prima donas to work together, I don't know ...

Jean: You mean like Unsoeld?

Jack: Well, I didn't know any of them. My brother-in-law again knew quite a few. He sent his son up with one of them. I know their records are, they've climbed a lot harder things than they guided in the Tetons. Uh, Glenn is to be commended for having them work together. I don't know any other climbing school where ...

Tape One, side B:

Jack: the respect they had for Glenn for a 20 foot climb.

Jean: You know, it seems to me that what they really respected him for was his personality.

Jack: Yeah. He has a personality. He likes to play the guitar and sing. And he, he was kind. Nobody was bad in his opinion, and uh, that's the way it is. And he was a teacher, and I guess he was a good teacher. His wife Beth ran his life for him a lot. He did what she said and he was the boss. And believe me, she was the boss. And how much he had to do with it, I don't know, because I wasn't around. And all of his concession and his group there. You can find out a lot more from the guy you are working for.

Jean: Yvon.

Jack: Yvon. Yeah. Yvon.

Jean: Yvons not paying for the book. He instigated it.

Jack: He just instigated it? He's not paying for it?

Jean: He would, but I figure if I have to have Yvon publish the book, Yvon doesn't have the kind of distribution. What he is letting me do, is, he's writing the forward, and he's letting me do a write-up in the Patagonia

Clothing Catalogue which gives the book a lot of exposure.

Jack: Yeah. He's a basically a very nice guy, and his wife runs that family pretty much.

Jean: Melinda, yeah. Wait a minute, there's a theme here. What kind of, tell me a little bit about the climbers that you knew, and their personalities.

Jack: I don't know any of them.

Jean: I don't mean the guides. I mean the type of person in the thirties who was climbing.

Jack: Oh. I climbed with Henderson of the Alpine Club. I guess he was treasurer of the Alpine Club. He was out there and wanted to climb with me, and I said, well let's do something worthwhile. I said I've had my eye on the lower Exum route that needs to be done. A route shouldn't start in the middle of the mountain. It should start at the bottom. And he said, I'm game to try. He was a guy that had, of few words. He didn't say anything that was unnecessary. No big conversationist. And when we climbed it, I said, uh, I'm going to go up the easiest way that it appears to be as we go. I don't intend to scare you. Its not my purpose. I want to make it as safe as possible. I'll be putting in pitons and I want you to take them out. I don't leave them around. Except one, to prove we've been here. Otherwise, I'd like em back. And I said, you know how to belay. I don't have to tell you that. And if I need a belay, I'll let you know. Then we came to this big sloping rock that you could see from the valley, that's in the middle of the, that's just below the Exum route. And I said we're now at the key of the thing, and I don't know what kind of, it looks like smooth rock. I'll go up and either we'll do it or we'll circumvent it if its too tough. And it turned out to be a piece of very easy climbing, and very exciting because you look between your feet and you look down a couple thousand feet. And here you have these beer handles to hand on to and all. And he had no problems with it. And we got up to where Glenn made his famous climb, and we climbed around that into the so-called Exum route, and had a ball going up because its so easy.

Jean: I've been on it.

Jack: You don't really need a rope. But, and I don't know if we came down it, or not. I came down it with a gal from University of the Pacific. She was in the athletic department and taught the girls how to exercise or something, and she said, I've been training a year for this, and I said, well, we'll go up the Exum route and we got up top and I said, You climbed beautifully. And I found no fault fault with it, why not, its never been climbed down. No one's ever climbed down it. Are you game? She says, sure. So we had no problems at all going down it.

Jean: Which route did you downclimb. The Exum?

Jack: Exum, yeah. And around the corner. She did it. She was in good shape. And uh, I never had any problems with it. And she liked it, and I congratulated her. i said, you got yourself in good shape. You climbed beautifully. You are a real mountaineer. She was tickled to death and went back to school, the University of Pacific, whatever it was. Was it in Oregon or someplace?

Jean: Sounds like it might be in the northwest in Seattle. Puget Sound?

Jack: I'm not aware where it was. But anyway, those are the two I climbed with. And Spofford, his wife, were skinny people and sort of tall, and they were both good climbers. Particularly the guy. I never had any problems with him. And when we did the route on Symmetry Spire, he was a good second. And uh, who else did I climb with? I climbed with my brother-in-law who did a lot of bouldering with me. We did the hourglass on the North Face of, on Nez Pierce. And we got struck by lightening on that going down. And uh, then we did the Dyke on the Middle. And my brother-in-law led have of the southwest ridge that's right across from the Exum Route. And it had some pitches that were interesting. Not that difficult. And then I did it with Mike Davis, the west ridge, three day climb. And Mike was very strong. And he had climbed around Dartmouth some, and he knew the techniques. No problems. And who else did I climb with. Thats about it. There were some Dartmouth boys that went up the Grand with us. And I went up Mt. Owen with some of them. They were all climbers from Dartmouth. They were pretty much like I expected them to be. There's Charlie Mclean. And he was pretty good. He was an old marine. And one year I took out one of the sons of a Dartmouth professor, the son of a judge from somewhere in Wisconsin. And uh, we climbed with the

kids, and it scared the hell out of him. And the old marine guy was with us, and he told em stories about marines, and we had a good time. The young kids really, ... one was very good. The judges son was very good and the other one was a cry baby. He was scared to death we'd ever get home again.

Jean: What is it about climbing that you like so much? Or that you liked?

Jack: Oh, I think people see mountains and they feel the challenge. They want to get up on the top of the thing. And I had that feeling about some of the routes I did. I thought they would be fun. And not dangerous. I had no desire to fall. And i didn't. And now I'll never climb again because of my knees, they're shot.

Jean: Did you just wear them out?

Jack: No, I injured them in the 1935 Olympic trials on Mt. Washington. I schussed from the top of Washington, into Tuckerman's Ravine. Have you ever been in Tuckerman's Ravine?

Jean: Huh uh. I've never been to Mt. Washington.

Jack: Its pretty steep and there's a twenty foot source to it. So you gotta go within the 20 feet so that you hit a slope down the main [inaudible] otherwise, you go over a 600 foot cliff. And uh, I'd just come back from Germany, and my brother was, won all the races in the East and the West and every place he raced. And they expected me to be a great racer. I'm a great downhiller, only I don't turn. I didn't know how to turn at speeds. Any rate, they let me go second in that race, and I followed the trail down where the guy went first. And I expected a few turns. He never turned once. He went straight down the tome[?] into the place where you go into a steep turn that's about a thousand feet I think from the top of the Tuckermans to the bottom, and I found myself airborne, 450 feet or more, and I landed still on my skis. I was going to fast to try to turn. So I get to the bottom, and I hit a place where, it was late in the year and the snow melted in the day and then turned to ice. And this was in the shadows still. A twenty foot diameter icy spot. I went through that backwards. Skiis went from under me, you know, racing through it, and the other side it was wet snow. And they stuck. It went, badududu. I sheered off all the

screws that had my bindings screwed down. It was a Hague binding, and they used to make holes in the wood and they put these little jackets to put the screws into them, and adjust your bindings and boots. And I sheered off all those binding and all those screws. And I broke my poles. And I was knocked out. I regained consciousness. And coasted through the finish. And I was 6/10ths of a second behind the guy that won the race. And i spent the next six weeks in bed. And so I have no cartilage in either knee. And they've advised me to have replacement knees and suspecting that I would have to have them done, someday, I've been following people who had em done and I didn't find any of em that were too happy.

Jean: Or better off than you feel you are now?

Jack: They said the first, you know, originally they thought it was a good deal. After a year they thought, well, its better than I was, but not much. Then the third year, they said, why the hell did I do it.

Jean: Do you have to keep really stretched?

Jack: Well, when I get up, after I've been down for a long time, i have to get up a stretch my tendons and things so I can walk. I fall occasionally. Have fallen. And I'm careful not to fall anymore. But, uh, I've got a, I've been looking for a surgeon that has a good record. Number one, he should have done a lot of them. Number two, he should have been successful in more than fifty percent.

Jean: We have a really good surgeon up in Jackson. His name is Peter Roark. Very good at knees. I don't know it he's good at that.

Jack: Does he do artificial knees?

Jean: I don't know if he's good at that. I could find out. Jackson is a ski town.

Jack: I know that. Is Ginny Huidekuper up there at all?

Jean: Virginia: Or Jim?

Jack: No. Jim.

Jean: Uh, I'd only met Virginia. I used to work for the Jackson Hole News.

Jack: Oh. So that's how you met her. She wrote the, did the uh ...

Jean: Early Days.

Jack: Early Days. I've never met her. But I see Jim every time I go up.

Jean: You do? Did he have the same thing done?

Jack: Well, he has a doctor up there that wants to do it to him, and I said ...

Jean: Lambert maybe.

Jack: Well, I don't know what his name is, but I said Jesus, you've asked me about your heart, and about everything that you've had done, and I advise something to you and you do the opposite. I said, don't ask me about your god damn knees. I don't care. Fall off for all I care.

Jean: What kind of a physician were you? Or what kind of medicine did you practice.

Jack: Chest diseases. Tuberculosis. Cancer. Anything wrong with the chest.

Jean: So what is that called?

Jack: A numenologist.

Jean: Numenologist.

Jack: Yeah. Or chest specialist is the common ...

Jean: Let me just look at my ... actually, really, you know believe it or not you really helped me a lot. I appreciate it.

Jack: Have I?

Jean: Yeah, you really have.

Jack: Well, I haven't said anything about Glenn, but I can't say much about him except I think he's crazy, being so naive about people.

Jean: Well, it kind of, its funny that you say that, because, its been difficult for me because he's so nice, that I can't really get the truth.

Jack: Yeah, well, how he charmed these ruffians, you know, these mountain climbers and pretty rough characters. And how he got them all to live together even, is unexplained. I don't know what power he has over them. He must have some power over them, because my brother-in-law used to tells me stories like, the guys excuse themselves so they can go to the end of the trail and hear him tell the clients that are going away, give them his blessings. You know, Jesus. That's not like a mountaineer.

Jean: He was very atypical, wasn't he, that way?

Jack: Yeah, he was a starry-eyed music teacher who saw only the best things in some of the worst rogues in the world. And uh, he kept em together. And I don't know, course he gives us the treatment when we go downstairs and he'll get his guitar and play some psalm, a religious thing, and sing. And Hank and I just die.

Jean: Do you visit him at his house, or has he been here?

Jack: No, he hasn't been here. When we go to Jackson.

Jean: Oh, you have a place over in Idaho.

Jack: I don't. He does. My brother-in-law. He has a place over in Driggs.

Jean: Oh, I see.

Jack: Yeah. We have a place in Driggs.

Jean: I actually tried calling you there this summer.

Jack: Well, he goes up there after, in late July to escape the mosquitos.

Jean: So, this is the guy who wrote this book? [referring to Talus]

Jack: Wrote this book? No, he's in the book. Hank didn't write the book. Hank helped the guy with his writing. See, he read and corrected some of it. As he did with K2. He instigated that, cause he thought I got a rough deal. Wiessner tried to blame me for the four guys that got killed. And I didn't have any, I had no weight to carry with anyone. Nobody knew me, but everybody knew him. So, I didn't do anything for fifty years. And they got my diary and the guy that did the writing said that many things that Wiessner told him didn't jibe with what he'd heard from other people. Then we got a film that Dudley Wolff had taken. And Wiessner'd sworn that Kramler never was down in a crevasse. And Dudley's films showed him being let down and in the crevasse.

Jean: Oh. So he lost credibility.

Jack: Yeah. They thought we'd better straighten this thing out as best they could. And they had access to my diary, which I couldn't find. It was up there in the bookcase somewhere. Stella found it, my wife.

Jean: Oh. What a great name.

Jack: And then I didn't think I had any pictures, and Hank went down in the cellar and found the pictures. So, those were necessary. And he got somebody else's diary, which supported my views, and wrote the book. Have you read that?

Jean: I have. Actually, do you know Peter Pilafian?

Jack: No.

Jean: He's a mountaineer. He filmed, did the film K2. I have his book. No, and I need to read that one. Actually, I'm really pleased that Talus came out, because um ...

Jack: Talus? Oh, it has all the history of the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club, which I didn't know because I was gone.

Jean: It was after you'd formed it.

Jack: And Corbet is in it from beginning to end. And the guy's style is pretty amusing. You will like reading it. And you can get the book up in, well, there is a guy up, well, I'll give you his catalogue.

Jean: Well, I um, lets see. Engle. [the name of the author?]

Jack: Engle. Yeah. I got two catalogues, so you can have this one.

Jean: Great. I'll come down there. [turn off tape recorder, turn back on]

Jack: [we discuss cross-hybridization of irises, who he's given irises to in Jackson, Renny and Catherine Jackson, Catherine's guiding with Exum, I tell Jack about ice-skating on the black ice of Slide lake near the Gros Ventre. he got out of school (medicine) in 1943. 1943 is when I went to Fort -- in Houston and was trained how to be a soldier.

Jean: So you missed the tenth mountain division altogether. Were they interested in having you? Did they ask you or anything?

Jack: No, I was in med school, deferred for it, until I went through an accelerated program. We didn't have any vacations. We just went straight through med school. And then I did my internship, residency.

Jean: Were you with Stella at the time? Had you married?

Jack: Yes, we were married and had our children. We had one child, two children, and this was a small house in the back, and I drew the plans for this part.

Jean: I really like it. Its spacious.

Jack: [we are looking at his pictures on the wall] And all the children were raised here.

Jean: How many children do you have?

Jack: We have four girls and one boy. The boy is a lawyer in Montpelier, Vt., and one daughter thats in California, she's a captain on the airlines.

And another is a social worker in Kansas. Another one, she's in town here. Not in town but in Longmont, some forty miles north. And she's a midwife, teaching over at the University.

Jean: Interesting.

Jack: And the other one was a potter. And she got rheumatoid arthritis. And had both of her feet operated, and her hands are not usable for pottery. She's in town, and trying to learn how to paint. Watercolors. And uh, she's having a hard time. And my brother just had his back operated in Minneapolis. He broke it skiing and in an automobile accident. He's having intractable pain. He had an operation down in LA and the guy was scared to do the work. He was afraid he'd paralyze him. And nobody in this town would touch him. Somehow, he got on to this clinic in Minneapolis that specializes in backs, and had his four lower vertebrae fused. And pieces of his hip bone was grafted in, and metal rods and things put in. He's coming home next week. What's the place called above Aspen? Its something with Snow. Its right below Snowmass.

Jean: Barry Corbet says he knows your brother. And your son, maybe?

Jack: My son, yeah. My sons a photographer, too. [turn off recorder, turn back on again] And the son is better than he is. [discussing fly-fishing] And Glenn was always kind and forgiving, and that's all I know of him. He would never say a bad thing about anybody. And he has plenty to say about Paul Petzoldt. Caused him a lot of headaches, I'm sure. And I'm sure that Betsy, is it Betsy, his wife?

Jean: Beth.

Jack: I'm sure that Beth helped him get along with Paul, I don't know how. But uh.

Jean: Well, you know actually, in the fifties, things weren't going so well. I think Paul went off to the war to do all this stuff and I think Glenn became more confident running the school. And then they didn't see eye-to-eye. Because of Paul's lack of integrity and Glenn has so much integrity, that I think Glenn started to become uncomfortable. And what happened is, they started rotating years and one year Glenn was gone. Everything just really went. And Glenn got back and the superintendent.

Jack: He kind of gave me an overlook of that, but I forgot it. I knew that they shared it, and Paul, did Paul sell it to him or not?

Jean: Well, what happened is ...

Jack: Paul offered to sell it. And, whatever you say, I won't be surprised.

Jean: What happened is, actually, I think the superintendent, they were sort of disagreeing about issues. Cause I guess Paul had let the insurance lapse and was in debt. You know, hadn't been maintaining the business. And so was putting the business at risk. And so, they decided to let the park decide who would get to take the concession. And the superintendent of course chose Glenn.

Jack: So he didn't have to pay Paul for it.

Jean: No.

Jack: It would be deplorable if he did.

Jean: No. He had to pay the park, though. Whatever they had to do to secure the concession, but he didn't pay Paul off or anything. And Paul thinks that ...

Jack: Does Glenn still get a percentage?

Jean: No. I think they just bought it outright. Purchased it outright. Because I think they make money. The four owners. But when they first bought it, they were breaking even, making a little more. But now because of all the national coverage and everything, they're actually making money.

Jack: Well, they should make money with the prices they charge.

Jean: Do you think they are too high? Even for the cost of living?

Jack: Well, I don't know if they are too high or not. Who am I to say. I'm not living off of it. And they were too low when I was there. I could hardly make a grub steak out of keeping what Paul kept as his half.

Jean: I know that the guides still consider that they are paid well. I know the guides who guide ...

Jack: Well thats why he has them there. They've got to know that they'd get money for it, or they wouldn't do it.

Jean: And the guides feel that for guiding and the work they do, its good money.

Jack: Yeah.

Jean: More profit than ... and they are definitely sharing it with people who do the work.

Jack: Well, when people are engaged in risking their lives, they are not going to be part of being not paid, as I wasn't. I had to eat, and Paul Petzoldt didn't give a damn whether I did or didn't. So he had the effrontery to, I saw him in Aspen on the ski slopes after my expedition. He says, Jack, you and I, we would have climbed it. I said And how was I to get down again?

Jean: On which expedition? K2?

Jack: K2. He says you and I could have climbed it. [chuckle]

Jean: Yeah, you gotta trust your climbing partner.

Jack: Oh well.

Jean: You have some nice art work.

End of interview.